

Media influence and ingrained prejudice



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The origins of prejudice vary greatly from one culture to another. Some cultures appear to have prejudice ingrained into them over long periods of time, while other forms of prejudice occur much more rapidly. Regardless of the length of time that a prejudice has existed, the media can contribute to perpetuating and strengthening an ingrained prejudice through its multiple outlets. While the origins of prejudice differ, medium such as television, the internet, newspapers, and magazines can have a very strong influence on an already existing prejudice or even help to solidify a newly developed prejudice belief.

Origins of Prejudice

There are many proposed theories on the origins of various prejudice beliefs and behaviors. One theory is that prejudice actually has a genetic and evolutionary basis. Another possible origin of prejudice is based on societal interactions and laws created by those in authority (Baron & Branscombe, 2012). Yet another theory is that prejudice goes hand in hand with racism and is accelerated by certain events or acts which may be deemed as a threat are performed by people sharing a particular ethnicity, religion, physical characteristics, or otherwise common characteristic (Baron & Branscombe, 2012).

Prejudice when described as having an evolutionary and genetic background is often explained by the process of natural selection. This theory suggests that the brain patterns of early humans were actually wired to establish a type of prejudice against those of differing physical characteristics (Utsey,

Ponterotto, & Porter, 2008). During the early days of human development, limited resources often caused much competition between various clans or tribes. The tendency of humans then was to give members of their own clan a priority for survival and viewed others as possible threats. One such idea is the resource retention rule theory, which suggests that prejudice views were formed especially during periods of scarce resources (Utsey, Ponterotto, & Porter, 2008). During these periods, groups of humans would try to stockpile resources for their own family or tribe which most often tended to be other people with like physical characteristics. Outsiders were avoided or viewed as less worthy of the various resources (Utsey, Ponterotto, & Porter, 2008). Another similar type of theory based on genetic evolution is called the theory of inclusive fitness (Fishbein, 2003). This theory states that people who are in the same family group will show preferential treatment toward their family and sometimes show hostility towards people from other groups (Fishbein, 2003).

When viewing how prejudice is passed down from one generation to the next, some theories suggest that those in authority are primarily responsible for perpetuating a particular prejudice belief (Fishbein, 2003). This is accomplished by a younger generation being taught by their elders certain prejudice beliefs about those of other groups. The younger generation is expected to accept these views as complete truth and in turn pass it on to their children. It has been suggested that this method is the main source of perpetuating prejudice beliefs throughout human evolution (Fishbein, 2003). These beliefs many times are also perpetuated in modern media.

Effects of the Media on Prejudice Today

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In modern society the media has many outlets available to communicate and influence the thoughts and perceptions of a wide range of people regardless of culture and age. Primary forms of media include radio, printed material such as magazines and newspapers, television, and now the internet with its multi-facets of communication reach nearly every corner of the earth. For example, talk radio programs have been around for many decades and are broadcast in almost every country around the globe. These outlets can have a powerful effect on prejudice thoughts of their viewers.

One example of prejudice in the media occurred during Hurricane Katrina and the aftermath of flooding that occurred in New Orleans, Louisiana. During this terrible natural disaster, African-American citizens of New Orleans were often depicted in a negative light by the mainstream media. Many such citizens were reported as being involved in activities such as plundering and anarchy, however most of these claims were showed to be untrue afterwards (Sonnett, Johnson, & Dolan, 2015). During the flooding two photographs also appeared in the mainstream media which were widely distributed and showed further prejudice by their captions. One photo was of a younger caucasian couple out “ finding” bread and soda while wading through chest-deep water, while a very similar photo of a youthful black man also in chest-deep floodwater carrying food was labeled as “ looting” (Sonnett, Johnson, & Dolan, 2015).

In some modern films there seems to be a movement of sorts to portray prejudice as a behavior that everyone exhibits, regardless of race or background. According to Nishi, Matias, and Montoya (2015), the 2004 film *Crash* is an example of such a perspective (Haggis & Cheadle, *Crash*). The <https://assignbuster.com/media-influence-and-ingrained-prejudice/>

film has several scenes depicting prejudice behavior. One scene shows a black woman being assaulted by a police officer who is white. However in another scene shortly following, an African-American man is himself exhibiting prejudice behavior against his partner. Research by Nishi et al. (2015) suggests that this is a type of colorblindness which in reality is not accurate either historically or in modern times. It has been proposed that this perspective is actually meant to excuse the prejudice behavior shown by white people, as people of minority backgrounds are also showing similar ingrained prejudice behavior (Nishi et al. 2015).

Another avenue of the media that has the power to project prejudice behavior is that of advertising, especially in television. Commercials on television have great influence on prejudice, not only by what products are being advertised, but more importantly on who the advertisements depict. According to the research performed by Howell (2012), African Americans are often portrayed in commercials, but there is a clear trend towards depicting lighter skinned African American females in television advertisements. In fact, in commercials which feature an African American couple, there is an approximate five to one ratio where the male is darker skinned than the female (Howell, 2012). This obvious trend would appear to suggest a prejudice in the media against dark skinned females.

Conclusion

It is clear to see that while the origins of prejudice can be varied, the media has the ability to influence nearly any type of prejudice that may exist. Through its many facets, the media reaches nearly every culture on earth in

some form or another. Regardless of whether a prejudice is based on what might be a genetic or evolutionary trait, societal disposition, or racial bias, the media has the power to help perpetuate or tear down these ingrained prejudice behaviors. Sadly, there are many examples of the media contributing to these deplorable behaviors, but hopefully time will prove that the influence of the media will be used to help dissolve ingrained prejudice.

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